

Goal: Establish Reciprocal Port Prevention Agreement between the U.S. and Canada

Many have been discussing the concept of a reciprocal port agreement between Canada and the U.S. as a way to establish prevention standards for vessels visiting either countries' ports on the West coast. Tanker and cargo vessel traffic transiting the Gulf of Alaska is significant and expected to increase as Canada's inland crude is shipped to foreign ports via tankers from British Columbia. Prince Rupert is also slated for extensive container port expansion. This is concerning because Alaska and Canada have limited response assets throughout most of these remote areas. The close call from the M/V SIMUSHIR - which left a U.S. port and nearly grounded in Canadian waters due to a loss of propulsion - highlights the need for increased prevention.

Both countries would benefit with increased information from vessels in areas with limited response assets.

A Reciprocal Port Prevention Agreement would establish identical requirements for vessels going to either country transiting the Gulf of Alaska. We suggest minimal, common sense, prevention requirements such as:

1. Establishment of vessel routes and requirement they be adhered to so that vessels are kept offshore to allow for substantial response time.
2. Early notification to the coastal state when a vessel incurs a casualty or is disabled.
3. Participation in a monitoring system so that vessels are tracked and assistance provided when needed.
4. Identification of places of refuge with potential mooring buoys.
5. Prepositioning of assets such as towing packages and ship arrestors.

To achieve this, vessels would need to register with a tracking service that would verify compliance throughout transit and communicate with the vessel and Coast Guard from the appropriate country if a vessel isn't in the right area, is operating at a reduced speed, or appears to be disabled. That service would cost a fee but would provide automated compliance with minimal workload increases for the Coast Guard of both countries. If both countries have identical standards, all ports on the west coast would require compliance so that all vessels must participate and neither Country establishes an economic disadvantage.

Through Alternative Planning Criteria, the U.S. Coast Guard is requiring something similar in Western Alaska. It has worked extremely well with many examples of vessels correcting their course after communication from the Coast Guard. USCG, District 17 has been working closely with their Canadian counterparts emphasizing oil spill drills and exercises. However, The State of Alaska would like to see this work expanded to include prevention. This concept seems like a plausible way to achieve that.

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